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ABSTRACT

Twenty-two issues of each of six magazines published between 1915 and 1925 were analyzed to determine whether those magazines served only as mirrors of social change or took a more active role, either as agents of social change or as agents of social conservatism. Specifically, the study examined the manner in which the following magazines covered the birth control controversy: "Good Housekeeping," "Atlantic Monthly," "Catholic World," "The Nation," "The New Republic," and "The Journal of the American Medical Association." One hundred fifty-nine articles concerning the subject were found in the magazines. Of these, 107 were judged to view birth control in a positive manner and 48 to view it in a negative manner. Only two articles were judged to be neutral. The analysis revealed that (1) two of the magazines ("The New Republic" and "The Nation") served as active agents of social change, (2) one ("Catholic World") acted as an agent of social conservatism, (3) two ("Atlantic Monthly" and "The Journal of the American Medical Association") seemed to serve as passive agents of social conservatism, and (4) one ("Good Housekeeping") served primarily as a mirror of social change. (FL)

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Participants In Or Reflectors Of The Social Change Process?:

Six Selected Magazines Consider The Birth Control

Controversy, 1915-1925

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Contemporary historians have characterized the early decades of the 20th Century as packed with challenges to America's social status quo. During these years, Americans were busy adjusting to changing life styles and shifting values. At least one of these historians contends that the mass media were central to America's transition from Victorian standards of strict behavior toward the more permissive values of a mass culture. Within this process of change, the media exhibited the same pluralism as did the audiences they served. Thus, rather than speaking with a unified voice, the media occupied various points on a continuum which ran from social conservatism to social change.

A number of the suggestions for change which were given media attention centered on serious threats to emotion laden values tied closely to America's Puritan heritage. One such challenge came from a group of reformers who advocated the right of the individual to obtain birth control information. These reformers charged that Americans were exploited by the law, the church, the medical profession, and the economy because these forces worked together to prohibit the

dissemination of contraceptive information and devices. The reformers challenged directly the authority of the Christian churches which taught that the decision to have or not have children rested with God not with people. This religious doctrine was given force by the federal Comstock laws² which classified birth control information and devices as obscenity. Thus, the law joined together with social and religious customs to prohibit the distribution of birth control information.

Histories of the birth control movement indicate that during the time period 1915-1925, the climate of public opinion concerning this issue shifted significantly.³ During this eleven year period, public discussion of family planning increased and the right of the married individual to seek and receive birth control information began to be established. This study investigates the manner in which the birth control controversy was discussed (or not discussed) by a selection of magazines throughout this critical time in the movement's evolution. More specifically, this research investigates whether the selected magazines served merely as mirrors of social change or went beyond the role of reflector to serve the more active role of agent of either social change or social conservatism.

Methodology

The birth control issue was selected for investigation because it remains one of current interest, because it is one symbol of the social realignments going on in this country during the early years of the 20th Century, because it is a complex issue reflecting a power struggle between individuals and traditional institutions, because it represents a serious challenge to a basic value which had been

long held in this country, and because the issue has a broad base. Magazines were selected as the medium studied for several reasons including:

Magazines circulate nationally. Thus, the magazine writer is potentially reaching a nationwide audience having in common some type of interest other than those locally tied.

During a era preceding the time period specifically studied, the medium's ability to exhibit a social conscience and social awareness was forcefully shown.

Most magazines are distributed through the mail. This factor brings into potential play the force of the Comstock laws which prohibited the dissemination of birth control information or devices through the mail.

Many magazines clearly define their audiences and their editorial purposes so that a selection of magazines appealing to different sections of society could be made.

The magazine journalist may be given more time and space to investigate an issue than is the newspaper journalist.

The actual magazines chosen for analysis were Good Housekeeping, Atlantic Monthly, Catholic World, The Nation, The New Republic, and the Journal of the American Medical Association. These publications were selected because they occupy various points on the spectrum of opinion concerning the issue. The publications also varied in expressed editorial purpose, reached different audiences and were published throughout the entire time period studied. Two of the magazines, Catholic World and the Journal of the American Medical Association, were published by groups on record against the dissemination of birth control information. Two of the publications, The Nation and The New Republic, were journals devoted to the debate of controversial issues and were representative of journals generally supportive of social change. Good Housekeeping was selected because it defined as a family/women's magazine and as such circulated to a readership which might have perceived the birth control issue as highly salient.

Atlantic Monthly was selected because it defined itself as a literary magazine including articles dealing with social problems.

Questions guiding the inquiry include:

What type of coverage (editorial, news, fiction, etc.) was given to the birth control controversy?

How frequently were articles related to the controversy run?

How was the issue defined (ie, as a social problem, a free speech issue, a political issue, an economic issue, an ethical issue, a medical/scientific issue, a moral issue, etc)?

Did the publication studied take an explicit editorial stand on the issue?

Overall, were the images of the birth control movement presented supportive, unsympathetic, or neutral?

Were significant issues in the history of the movement mentioned?

Did the type of coverage or the position of the coverage change across the time period studied?

Answers to the questions were derived by using both traditional methods of historical investigation and an analysis of a random sampling of the selected magazines (for a list of the magazines read see Appendix A). More specifically, approximately 1/6th or 22 issues of each monthly magazine was read and approximately 1/12th or 42 issues of each weekly publication was read.⁴

The Magazines

Each of the six publications analyzed varied in expressed editorial purpose and prospective audience served. Both factors are reflected in the subject classification assigned each magazine by the N.W. Ayer and Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory. Table 1 shows the magazines sampled, circulation figures from 1915-1925, the frequency of publication, the subject orientation given to each by Ayers and the number of issues read. Table 1 is followed by the data presentation and the conclusions.

TABLE 1
CIRCULATION INFORMATION ON MAGAZINES SAMPLED*

TITLE	SUBJECT ORIENTATION	CIRCULATION 1915	1919	1921	1923	1925	PUBLICATION FREQUENCY
ATLANTIC MONTHLY	Literature	32,071	81,482	107,776	117,352	121,987	Monthly
CATHOLIC WORLD	Catholic	19,000	19,000	50,000	N.A.	N.A.	Monthly
GOOD HOUSEKEEPING	Family	350,000	442,600	682,823	780,560	1,070,927	Monthly
JOURNAL OF THE AMERICAN MEDICAL ASSOCIATION	Medical	57,399	64,663	74,571	77,132	79,900	Weekly
NATION	Independent	8,000	8,467	28,960	24,732	31,251	Weekly
NEW REPUBLIC	Current Comment	N.A.	31,200	35,000	N.A.	30,000	Weekly

*All figures and classifications are taken from N.W. Ayer and Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory, New York: N.W. Ayer and Son's, 1915, 1919, 1921, 1923, 1925. N.A. indicates that the figures for that particular year were not listed in the directory.

Good Housekeeping

Good Housekeeping was first published in 1885 "in the interests of higher life in the household."⁵ During the time period 1915-1925, a typical issue carried eight fiction stories (three of them serials), four non-fiction articles, several poems, children's stories, and advice on architecture, home furnishings, fashions, and beauty which reflected the magazine's editorial pattern of fiction and reader service.⁶ The magazine also carried regular reports from the Good Housekeeping Institute.

As shown in Figure 1, the sampled issues of Good Housekeeping carried twenty articles which discussed birth control.⁷ Of these

Figure 1
Articles Appearing On Birth Control By Year



twenty articles 5 were fiction and 15 were non-fiction. Only one fiction story was found to contain material favorable to the movement. Four fiction pieces contained negative impressions concerning the practise of birth control. Non-fiction articles unfavorable to birth control appeared most frequently from 1915-1919. Articles containing positive comment were relatively equally distributed across the time period in both terms of number and publication dates.

The greatest number of articles dealing with birth control appeared in 1915. During that year each of the five articles located contained one or more unfavorable references to birth control. However, no articles negative to birth control were found in Good Housekeeping after 1918. Table 2 shows the breakdown by article type of positive and negative articles found.

Table 2
Positive and Negative Articles by Type and Year:
Good Housekeeping

Positive											Total	
Non-fiction	0	1	2	1	0	1	1	0	2	0	1	9
Fiction	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
1915 1916 1917 1918 1919 1920 1921 1922 1923 1924 1925												
Negative											Total	
Non-fiction	3	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Fiction	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
1915 1916 1917 1918 1919 1920 1921 1922 1923 1924 1925												

Sentimentality and emotionalism were characteristics evident in both fiction and non-fiction writing presenting birth control in a negative light. For example, in a fiction piece, an unhappy life awaited one woman who admitted once practicing birth control. In the story "Cheated" by Gertrude Hamilton, an upper class woman visits her doctor because she has been unable to conceive.⁸ She visited the doctor because her husband wanted children and warned her "There are just the two of us--you and I, no other sort of bond. Be careful."⁹ In her conversation with the doctor the woman reveals that she once practiced birth control:

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'At first,' her voice snapped off. A dreadful reluctance to speak seemed to seize her. 'At first doctor I did everything to avoid the pain and inconvenience of having children.' She brought out the statement with labored difficulty in the form of a guilty confession. 'I was petted and pretty. I was afraid of physical pain--risk of possible loss of slenderness. I was selfish. I was short-sighted! I believe children are what men marry for. Does averting childbirth at first make having children less sure later on?'

The doctor's face was grave. 'Possibly, but it is not invariably so; yet, anything we do against nature is always hazardous. 10

At the end of this story, the woman decided to divorce her husband so that he could be free to marry a woman who could bear him children.

Childbearing as a natural obligation was also stressed in the non-fiction article, "The Homesick Woman."¹¹ In this feature story, Nancy Musselman wrote that in every woman's heart existed a seed of the desire for home and children. She observed that while most women nurture this seed, "a negligible few among many millions have the ungodly determination not to accept the fundamental obligation which nature has laid upon her, that of bearing children."¹²

In December 1916, Good Housekeeping ran a fiction story which clearly depicted procreation as the highest role of humankind. The story, "Their Children," described the sacrifices made by two young artists for their children.¹³ Both Paul and Katherine Craye are judged to be promising artists. But, as time progressed and more and more children were born, "the artist had gone down under the glorious siege of motherhood."¹⁴ Their friends advised the couple not to have too many children because the pressures of extensive parenthood would destroy their talents. But, the Crayes do not heed this advice and have child after child. In old age they reflected:

...their love, their sacrifice had been like some high altar at which their friends had looked in reverence. More simply and clearly than ever before they saw that the most sacred heritage of a man and woman, higher than love, higher than

genius, is the duty of guarding and fostering the coming generation.¹⁵

In November 1917, the editors stated a change in editorial policy and focus as follows:

We have learned much this year; that women no longer care for the type of story that is written just for a woman's magazine. And, why should they? This type generally speaking is a poor one taking in no account of the modern woman's interest but woven warp and woof of sentimentality and emotionalism.¹⁶

In addition, the editors reaffirmed the magazine's dedication to service to the homemaker and promised to stress more "modern" themes. This change in editorial focus may well have influenced the type of coverage given to the birth control movement during the latter years of the study.

After 1917, Good Housekeeping presented birth control as an acceptable part of contemporary society. For example, in an October 1918 article, the opinion that birth control would be universally accepted in the future was expressed:

The community of the future will expect to control not only the extent of its birth rate, but also the quality of the human being.¹⁷

An article published in August 1921 stated directly that many women could lead fulfilled lives without marriage or motherhood.¹⁸ The acceptance of birth control as part of contemporary society was also expressed in a series of articles run in early 1923 by W.L. George. In the first of these articles George said:

There is if not exactly a new world, at least a renewed world, or better a world which has been speeded up. From the same sources come the agitations for saving children's lives, for birth control, for the opening of the harems, for the right of women to live outside marriage, or smoke in public; big things, little things, all tumbled together by a torrent which rolls rocks and pebbles in a common flood.¹⁹

In summary, twenty articles concerning birth control were found in the sampled issues. Although half of the articles contained negative images concerning birth control and half contained positive images, all negative images were published during the first three years studied. Thus, a shift in focus concerning birth control was found in Good Housekeeping. From short fiction stories and articles with happy endings to those who had large families and sad endings to those who practiced birth control, Good Housekeeping shifted and presented birth control as an acceptable part of the 1920's world. Although no explicit editorial on the issue was found, the magazine's change in focus seemed to occur after the editorial statement of November 1917. After this statement, the magazine ceased to present woman's primary role as motherhood and started presenting some reasons women might correctly want to avoid pregnancy. In addition, birth control was not dealt with as a social movement and only once were birth control advocates discussed as possible objects of social exploitation.²⁰

The New Republic

The New Republic began publication in 1914 with Herbert Croly as editor. Croly wrote in the magazine's first issue that its purpose was to start "little insurrections" in the minds of its readers and "to prick and even goad public opinion into being more vigilant and hospitable, into considering its convictions more carefully."²¹ In 1915, a typical issue contained four or five long editorials, a cluster of short editorial notes, a number of letters to the editor, several general interest articles, and a section devoted to literary, theatrical and musical criticism. The New Republic was published weekly.

Total coverage regardless of focus was slightly higher in 1915 than in subsequent years as illustrated in Figure 2. As can be seen in Figure 2, The New Republic was found to contain no articles unfavorable to birth control after 1916.

Figure 2

Articles Appearing On Birth Control By Year: The New Republic



An analysis of coverage by story type revealed that the magazine carried more editorials than letters to the editor in favor of birth control and did not waver in its editorial support for the movement (see Table 3). Thus, even though the actual number of articles dealing with birth control which appeared varied greatly from year to year, The New Republic consistently supported the movement and kept the issue before its readership.

Typical of The New Republic's editorial position is the following statement contained in the magazine's first major message on the topic:

All decency today insists that no one shall be born until there is a home anxious to receive him, that nothing is to be gained

by the bearing of undesired and unforeseen children.

For after all, ignorance can be enforced only upon those wives of poor who suffer from it the worst, the young woman of the middle class who can find out, but it is the poor and the illiterate who need to know and cannot find out. It is the business of society to enlighten them, to allow physicians and district nurses and mother's clubs to spread the needed information. It should not be necessary for brave women like Mrs. Sanger to risk their liberty.

Fewer children and ²² better ones is the only policy a modern state can afford.

Table 3

Positive and Negative Articles by Type and Year: The New Republic

												Total
<u>Positive</u>												
Editorial	4	3	4	1	2	2	3	3	1	3	3	39
Letters-to-The-Editor	5	3	1	2	0	0	1	2	1	0	0	15
	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	
<u>Negative</u>												
Letters-to-The-Editor	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	

The New Republic printed several letters-to-the-editor both pro and con in response to its editorial. Arguments against the editorial said that the editorial was founded "upon an assumption which is repugnant to many...that man is first and last an animal and that his chief instinct, the animal instinct toward reproduction, must not only be permitted, but encouraged."²³ Another reader who identified himself as a member of the clergy responded that the editorial was "deserving of rebuke beyond the power of words to express" because it invited "hopeless immorality" and was therefore "unfit to enter a Christian household."²⁴ The letter writer also said that "laws should be enacted to punish as criminals those who sowed such lies."²⁵ The writer also requested that his subscription be cancelled.

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A physician countered the editorial with the following:

A human monster, in the technical medical sense of the term which is born alive as a mere part of a trunk without head or limbs is beyond all our understanding better than a non-existent being. I know that the sufferings of this life are not to be compared with the glory of things to come. Existence or reality is a perfection: nonexistence is a defect of all reality.²⁶

Letters in support of the editorial called the piece "intellectual and humane"²⁷ and "a fine witness to the sincerity, courage, humanity, and intellectual grasp of your paper."²⁸

The editors seemed pleased with the volume of the response and restated their position as follows:

One thing is clear from the response to the editorial: the subject is one which large numbers of men and women all over the country are ready to discuss....

We do not say that people should practice contraception; we say that they should be allowed to learn it if they wish to. They should have the means put at their disposal, the arguments for and against it explained.

Throughout the remainder of the issues read, The New Republic consistently supported the advocates of birth control and argued against those who opposed the movement. For example, the magazine initially opposed the arrest of William Sanger for distributing the pamphlet Family Limitation and later condemned the judge who found Sanger guilty and sentenced him.³⁰ Similarly, the magazine spoke against the arrest and subsequent imprisonment of Ethel Byrne for distributing birth control information and devices in this country's first birth control clinic.³¹ In 1921, The New Republic criticized the arrest of Margaret Sanger as she tried to address the audience assembled for the First American Birth Control Conference and charged that the authorities had "arbitrarily withdrawn the right of assembly."³²

The magazine also criticized medical and religious leaders for either their silence on the issue or for their vocal opposition to

the movement. For example, in November 1917, the magazine condemned the New York Medical Society for its defeat of a motion which encouraged the state legislature to remove birth control from the list of those things considered obscene.³³ In 1921, The New Republic editorially criticized New York Archbishop Patrick Hayes for his vocal stand against birth control.³⁴

In July 1925, The New Republic claimed partial victory for the movement and indicated that total victory was inevitable:

That birth control has become almost universal among the middle and upper classes both as a practice and as a social theory, no one can doubt. The vital statistics of every civilized nation bear witness to the triumph of this reform which has made its way even in the face of the most determined opposition of many patriots and one powerful, not to say, universal church.

In the end, the churches will have to accept birth control simply because it will be impossible to induce the people to give it up so long as civilization continues.³⁵

Thus, during the time period studied, The New Republic editorially supported the advocates of birth control. The magazine condemned religious leaders, the medical profession, the law, and society's economic structure for positions taken against birth control. Although the word exploited was never explicitly used, both editorial statements and letters to the editor indicated that the writers thought lower class men and women were in fact exploited by those forces which worked to deny them contraceptive knowledge. The magazine did run editorials which concerned events of importance in the movement's evolution during the time period studied. The only negative comments concerning the movement appeared in letters to the editor and no such letters were found after 1916. Therefore, the messages concerning the movement across the time period studied were overwhelmingly positive.

The Nation

Founded in 1865 by E.L. Godkin, The Nation stressed editorial comment and literary criticism. When Oswald Garrison Villard became editor in 1913, he severed the magazine's ties with The New York Evening Post, and retained the publication's liberal viewpoint.³⁶

Although The Nation took a more international approach to the birth control movement, its overall editorial position was similar to that of The New Republic. The sampled issues of The Nation carried 52 articles discussing the birth control movement. Included in this sample were feature articles which applauded advances other countries were making in regard to birth control as well as editorials and letters to the editor. Figure 3 illustrates the number of articles both favorable and unfavorable which were located.

Figure 3



A breakdown of stories by type and orientation is shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Positive and Negative Articles by Type and Year: The Nation

Positive												Total
Articles	1	0	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	0	3	8
Editorials	1	0	0	0	0	1	5	2	6	9	0	24
Letters-to-The-Editor	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	9
Negative												
Articles	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Editorials	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Letters-To-The-Editor	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	4	3	1	0	11
1915 1916 1917 1918 1919 1920 1921 1922 1923 1924 1925												

that the poor were exploited by the rich concerning the dissemination of birth control information. For example, the following editorial paragraph appeared in May 1922:

It is a fact worthy of observation that the rich, the privileged, the capitalists, those who live in comfortable circumstances where they limit their birth rate without moral qualms themselves judge it a matter of the greatest immorality that the poor, the exhausted, the miserable, the underfed, the workers should try to limit their birth rate.⁴⁰

Likewise, the magazine editorially condemned church officials who attacked the practice of birth control as immoral. The Nation contended that religious leaders opposed the movement only because they believed that the widespread practice of birth control might deplete their congregations.⁴¹

The Nation also opposed all regulations which defined birth control as obscenity and termed these laws "senseless taboos."⁴² In 1924, the editors commented:

The public mind is changing faster than our legislators choose to believe. When the League of Women Voters, a non-partisan organization of real political power and of consequent caution, made up of middle class women, Catholics, Jews, and Protestants, with the prejudices of their class and religion, even this body in New York has voted to support birth control laws.⁴³

In March 1924, the magazine termed unpatriotic an ordinance passed in Syracuse, New York, which extended birth control prohibitions. The Nation called the move "a new record in zero per cent Americanism" and "an extraordinary assault on the constitutional rights of free assemblage and free speech."⁴⁴

Thus, much like The New Republic, The Nation gave consistent support to the birth control movement. The only negative messages concerning the movement which appeared were in letters-to-the-editor. The magazine condemned religious leaders, the law, and society's economic structure for all opposition to the movement. The Nation

paid particular attention to the argument that denying individuals access to birth control information was a form of socio-economic exploitation. The magazine very definitely defined the issue along class lines and contended that the rich and middle class already had access to birth control information and were being hypocritical by denying the same knowledge to the lower classes. The magazine ran articles and editorials which concerned events of importance in the movement's history during the time period studied. The Nation also indicated in its coverage of the issue that birth control was of international not just national importance. Although no articles were run during the time period 1916-1919 which dealt with the issue, coverage given from 1920-1925 was found to be overwhelmingly positive.

The Catholic World

Published by the Paulist Fathers in New York, The Catholic World led the Catholic Church's review journals in circulation during the period studied.⁴⁵ In the issues sampled across the eleven year time period studied, 21 articles attacking the movement were run. No positive messages concerning the movement were found. The primary argument set forth contended that birth control was sinful and went against both the will of God and the laws of nature. For example, one article contained the following:

The modern point of view will debate fearlessly and definitely the birth rate or lack of it for the poor without the faintest reference to anything like a law of nature or of God that would define such proceedings as sinful. In our traditional understanding of nature and Devine law we are forbidden to interfere with certain rights of the individual and of the family regardless of any and all of the demands of so-called progress.⁴⁶

The number of articles denouncing birth control by year are shown in Figure 4. As reflected in Figure 4, the number of articles denouncing birth control increased during the last two years studied. A breakdown

by article type appears in Table 5.

Figure 4

Articles Appearing Against Birth Control By Year:
The Catholic World

Number of
Articles

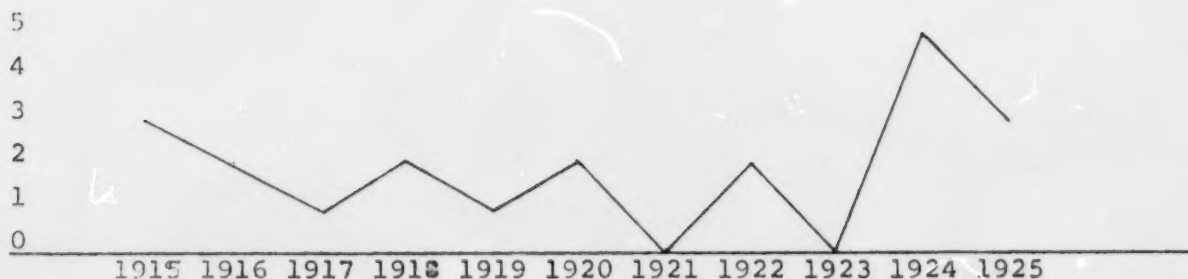


Table 5

Negative Articles By Type and Year: The Catholic World

Negative												Total
Editorials	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	0	4
Articles	3	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	3	11
Letters-To-The-Editor	0	0	0	1	1	2	0	2	0	0	0	6
	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	

A theme running through many of the stories/editorials was that the legalization of birth control information would lead to the breakdown of the family and result in national and international chaos. One author wrote:

...the unscrupulous owner, the anarchic workman, the radical socialist, the propagandist of birth control, all those whose teachings and activity are calculated to menace the order and life of the nations are put into the category 'the enemies of our own household.'⁴⁷

Another said:

Our country has witnessed, is witnessing now, a propaganda that is undermining one of the strongest of Christian traditions--the sanctity of the family, the duty and responsibility of husband and wife. We have heard over much of birth control. The conditions of which are bringing into relief the terrible consequences to the nation of the preaching that has defended it.

In 1922, the magazine ran an article stating that because Protestants approved of birth control their birth rate was declining and that God would punish them with the gradual extinction of their religion. However, the writer went on to conclude that Catholics and Orthodox Jews would survive because both religions spoke strongly against the practice of birth control.⁴⁹

Thus, throughout the time period studied, The Catholic World maintained an anti-birth control position and ran no articles of any type positive toward the movement. The Catholic World presented those who opposed the practice of birth control as following the will of God and the laws of nature. Anyone who supported the movement was therefore against the will of God and the laws of nature. Birth control advocates were charged with fostering worldwide chaos by pushing for the right to distribute birth control information and devices.

The Journal of the American Medical Association

The Journal of the American Medical Association (JAMA) was established in 1863 to serve two basic purposes: to act as the official record of all proceedings of the American Medical Association and to present current medical developments.⁵⁰ During the time period studied, a typical issue of the JAMA contained one extensive section on medical progress, one section devoted to news from the AMA, news from other medical groups, a page or two of editorials, several book reviews,

and a variety of research reports.

From 1915-1925, the sampled issues of this weekly publication gave virtually no coverage to birth control. The magazine was found to run only three articles which in any way dealt with the subject. One of these was a short response to a reader inquiry in 1921. The reader asked if the JAMA had ever published an article concerning the potential impact the dissemination of birth control information and devices would have on the income of physicians. The JAMA in part replied:

We have no reference to any article on the effect which birth control would have on the income of the physician. The social aspects of this measure in relation to the general population are so broad that the relative importance of any effect it might have on the income of physicians is infinitesimal.⁵¹

Thus, the editorial spokesperson for JAMA seemed to be saying that the publication and therefore the American Medical Association considered birth control to be a social rather than a medical problem.⁵²

The JAMA ran only one article containing research which had anything to do with birth control. This article reported a study done to determine functions of spermatozoa other than fertilization. In part, this study reported that injecting female rabbits with a serum made from rabbit sperm caused temporary infertility.⁵³ However, no research concerning birth control in humans such as was being openly conducted in England was summarized or mentioned and no specific discussions concerning the pros and cons of specific birth control methods were found.⁵⁴

In February 1923, the magazine published a letter to the editor from the Chicago Gynecological Society which summarized the Society's stand on birth control. In part the letter read:

- 1) It is against public policy that information as to contraceptives should be given to the general public.
- 2) Special clinics for the dissemination of this information are neither necessary nor desirable, nor should nursing organs be utilized to give out such instruction.
- 3) Risk to the mother based on ill health is the essential indication for instruction in the prevention of conception.
- 4) All mechanical devices used by the wife as well as strong chemicals, douches, etc., are discountenanced.⁵⁵

Because of the nature of these brief passages, it was concluded that only limited information about birth control was published in the JAMA. Further, the Journal expressed the belief that birth control was of social rather than medical concern. Thus, the JAMA did not disseminate birth control information to physicians. The JAMA's editorial position on this issue was basically one of silence.

Atlantic Monthly

The Atlantic Monthly was founded in 1857 as a literary publication. In 1899 under the editorship of Walter Hines Page, the Atlantic Monthly included articles dealing with social problems. This editorial focus became finer when Ellery Sedgwick became editor. Sedgwick "resolved that the Atlantic should face the whole of life, its riddles, its adventures, the critical questions of the day, and that no subject should be taboo if only it were discussed with urbanity."⁵⁶

In spite of Sedgwick's statement that no subject of social concern would be taboo if handled with urbanity, Atlantic's coverage of birth control in the issues sampled was scant. In fact, only three articles, two in 1915, and one in 1916, dealt with the subject.

The first of these articles, published in January 1915, spoke in favor of family limitation and eugenics.⁵⁷ An article the following month presented the opposing argument and included a statement

against family limitation:

A state is composed of an enduring race; that is to say of marriages producing children. To consider marriage without the child and merely as the satisfaction of the husband and wife is to take away from it all social character.⁵³

The final article included in this study contained an implicit reference to birth control. In this June 1916 article, Ellen Key discussed the effect of war on women. In part, Key wrote:

And lastly, the higher the development of women, the more they chafe under the 'patriotic' mandate to bear many children to replace the nation's losses. For they know that, from the point of view of their personal development as well as that⁵⁹ of the race, fewer, but better children are to be preferred.

Thus, only three articles which mentioned either explicitly or implicitly birth control were found in the Atlantic Monthly. Of the three articles published, two were positive concerning the movement and one was negative. No article considering birth control was found to be published after 1916.

Summary and Conclusions

The total number of articles found in the magazines read was 159. Of these 159 articles, 107 were judged to place birth control in a positive light and 48 were judged to place birth control in a negative light. Only two of the articles located were judged to be neutral and both of these articles were published in the Journal of the American Medical Association. For the purpose of statistical analysis, these two neutral articles have not been considered. The difference between the number of articles found to be positive to the movement and those found to be negative to the movement is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 22.458 < .001$). This difference is probably due to the fact that the magazines which were highly supportive of the movement ran a proportionately higher number of articles

concerning birth control than did the magazines which denounced the movement. In fact, only one magazine was found to be consistently negative in its coverage of the issue and at least two magazines paid almost no attention to the movement.

Table 6
Total Number of Positive/Negative Articles By Year

												Tot
Positive	12	3	7	4	2	6	16	18	10	12	12	10
Negative	12	6	2	3	1	3	2	6	4	6	3	4
Total	24	14	9	7	3	9	18	24	14	18	15	15
	1915	1916	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922	1923	1924	1925	

The total number of articles both positive and negative which appeared in the periodicals sampled by year appears in Table 6. As can be seen in Table 6, in no year did the number of negative articles outnumber the number of positive articles. However, in 1915, the first year studied, the number of positive and negative articles were equal. The greatest number of articles positive toward the movement were published in 1921 and 1922. The greatest number of negative articles were published in 1915. The total number of positive articles run from 1915-1920 was 39 and the total number of positive articles run from 1921-1925 was 68. This difference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 7.8598, < .01$). The total number of negative articles run between 1915 and 1920 was 27 and the total number of negative articles run between 1921 and 1925 was 21. This difference is not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = .750, > .05$). Therefore, it seems that while the number of negative articles remained fairly constant across the time period studied, the number of positive articles increased significantly especially during the last five years sampled.

Table 7 shows the number of positive and negative articles located by story type and magazine. The figures in Table 7 show that The New Republic ran more articles dealing with birth control than did any other publication sampled. A close second to The New Republic in total number of articles run concerning the movement was The Nation. Given the editorial purposes and orientations of these two magazines, these findings are not surprising. Similarly it is not surprising to note that the magazine which contained the most negative comment concerning the movement was The Catholic World. This type coverage was consistent with the position on the issue held by the magazine's parent organization, the Catholic Church. However, it is interesting to note that Good Housekeeping carried almost as many articles as did The Catholic World. However, the articles carried in Good Housekeeping were evenly divided between positive and negative. Referring back to Table 2, it can be seen that the interesting shift in Good Housekeeping's coverage of the issue was a time shift. That is the magazine carried no articles unfavorable to the movement after 1913 while the articles carrying favorable mention of the movement or the practice of birth control were rather even spaced across the years studied. The Journal of the American Medical Association and Atlantic Monthly gave very little coverage to the movement. Within this context, it is interesting to note that the JAMA apparently did not consider the topic a medical problem.

Table 7 also shows that messages concerning birth control were contained in four different types of articles: editorials, letters-to-the-editor, fiction, and non-fiction articles. Most mentions of birth control were found in editorials and over 10 times as many editorials contained positive references to the movement as did editorials con-

taining negative references. On the other hand, very little difference existed between the number of negative letters-to-the-editor and the number of positive letters. Likewise, positive and negative non-fiction articles were relatively equally divided. By comparison, very few fiction stories were found to discuss birth control and those which did tended to give tragic endings to those who practiced birth control and happy endings to those who did not.

Table 7
Total Number of Positive and Negative Articles
By Magazine and Story Type

							Total
Fiction							
Positive	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
Negative	4	0	0	0	0	0	4
Editorials							
Positive	0	39	24	0	0	0	63
Negative	0	0	0	6	0	0	6
Letters-To-The Editor							
Positive	0	15	9	0	0	0	24
Negative	0	4	11	5	1	0	21
Non-Fiction Articles							
Positive	9	0	0	0	0	2	21
Negative	6	0	0	10	0	1	17
	Good Housekeeping	New Republic	Nation	Catholic World	JAMA	Atlantic Monthly	

The type of coverage given to the birth control issue seemed to vary by magazine type. For example, both The New Republic and The Nation defined the birth control controversy as a social problem, a political problem, an economic problem, a moral issue, and a free speech issue. The Catholic World defined the issue entirely as a

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religious issue. The only time The Journal of the American Medical Association specifically addressed the issue, the Journal said that birth control was a social problem not a medical problem. For its seeming refusal to define birth control as a medical/scientific issue, the medical profession was severely criticized by The New Republic and The Nation. A shift seems to have occurred in the manner in which Good Housekeeping defined the issue. Early coverage given to birth control tended to be highly sentimental and emotional. Childbearing was presented as the basic purpose of life and anyone who went against nature and tried to limit births would be punished. However, after 1917, Good Housekeeping presented birth control as an integral part of contemporary society and indicated that both men and women could lead fulfilled lives without marriage and/or children. Good Housekeeping was the only magazine sampled which shifted the manner in which it seemed to define the issue during the years read. Atlantic Monthly really didn't seem to define the issue at all. The New Republic and The Nation were the only two publications read which discussed important events in the movement's history. None of the magazines read actually described methods of contraception.

Because of the amount of coverage given, the orientation of the coverage given, and the manner in which the birth control issue was defined, at least 2 of the 6 magazines read served as active agents of social change. At least 1 of the magazines served primarily as a mirror of social change (although because of the shift in role models presented its readership might have acted somewhat as a passive agent of social change). At least one magazine served as an active agent of social conservatism, and by virtually ignoring the issue, the remaining two magazines were judged to be passive agents of social

conservatism. The magazines judged to be active agents of social change concerning this issue were The New Republic and The Nation. Both these publications actively and consistently praised the advocates of birth control and condemned the movement's opponents. Both kept the issue squarely in front of the readership throughout the time period studied and by the end of the time period studied both were claiming eventual victory for the movement. The Catholic World clearly acted as an agent of social conservatism. This magazine consistently condemned the movement and told its readership in precise terms that birth control was not practiced by true Catholics. The magazine supported the 19th Century prevailing opinion that the control of births was left to God not to people. The two magazines which seemed to serve as passive agents of social conservatism were Atlantic Monthly and The Journal of the American Medical Association. However, because it did not report on medical developments in the field of birth control and did not discuss actual methods of contraception, the JAMA was probably more guilty of social conservatism than was Atlantic Monthly. The magazine which seemed to act as either a mirror of social change or a passive advocate of social change was Good Housekeeping. As society came to accept the birth control movement during the time period studied, Good Housekeeping shifted its position on the issue. This position may have been a reflector of the change it perceived in its readership. However, by no longer giving tragic ends to those who practiced birth control and by presenting birth control as a normal and acceptable part of contemporary life, the magazine may have presented role models to its readership which may have served as agents of social change.

APPENDIX A: List of Magazines Read

Atlantic Monthly

Jan. 1915
 Feb. 1915
 April 1915
 June 1916
 August 1916
 May 1917
 Jan. 1918
 July 1918
 Aug. 1919
 June 1920
 Nov. 1920
 April 1921
 Oct. 1921
 Jan. 1922
 Feb. 1923
 April 1924
 Sept. 1924
 Nov. 1924
 Dec. 1924
 Jan. 1925
 June 1925
 Sept. 1925

Catholic World

Jan. 1915
 April 1915
 Oct. 1915
 April 1916
 Aug. 1916
 May 1917
 Jan. 1918
 July 1918
 Aug. 1919
 June 1920
 Dec. 1920
 Feb. 1921
 Aug. 1921
 Apr. 1922
 Jan. 1924
 April 1924
 Sept. 1924
 Nov. 1924
 Jan. 1925
 March 1925
 June 1925
 Sept. 1925

Good Housekeeping

Jan. 1915
 May 1915
 Aug. 1915
 Sept. 1916
 Dec. 1916
 Jan. 1917
 April 1917
 October 1918
 Nov. 1918
 Feb. 1919
 July 1919
 May 1920
 July 1920
 Aug. 1921
 June 1922
 Sept. 1922
 Jan. 1923
 Feb. 1923
 March 1924
 April 1924
 March 1925
 Nov. 1925

Journal of the
American Medical
Association

April 8, 1915
December 2, 1915
December 15, 1915
March 18, 1916
June 3, 1916
Sept. 2, 1916
November 11, 1916
Dec. 9, 1916
January 27, 1917
February 24, 1917
March 30, 1917
May 26, 1917
Sept. 29, 1917
July 6, 1918
August 10, 1918
October 19, 1918
November 16, 1918
January 1, 1919
May 14, 1919
November 5, 1919
December 3, 1919
February 10, 1920
May 26, 1920
June 23, 1920
October 6, 1920
November 24, 1920
January 8, 1921
February 19, 1921
April 16, 1921
July 21, 1921
December 17, 1921
May 10, 1922
May 24, 1922
June 14, 1922
September 20, 1922
February 24, 1923
March 31, 1923
May 19, 1923
Sept. 22, 1923
Dec. 15, 1923
Jan. 2, 1924
June 5, 1924
Nov. 5, 1924
Nov. 26, 1924
April 15, 1925
June 17, 1925
July 22, 1925
November 13, 1925

Nation

April 8, 1915
December 2, 1915
June 10, 1916
September 29, 1916
May 26, 1917
July 6, 1918
January 1, 1919
November 24, 1920
December 15, 1920
April 27, 1921
November 30, 1921
December 14, 1921
February 1, 1922
February 22, 1922
March 2, 1922
March 15, 1922
May 3, 1922
May 10, 1922
June 7, 1922
August 30, 1922
September 6, 1922
September 27, 1922
January 3, 1923
February 14, 1923
May 16, 1923
October 3, 1923
October 24, 1923
December 5, 1923
December 19, 1923
January 2, 1924
February 6, 1924
February 20, 1924
March 5, 1924
March 19, 1924
April 2, 1924
April 9, 1924
April 23, 1924
April 30, 1924
July 23, 1924
April 15, 1925
May 27, 1925
July 1, 1925
July 9, 1925
July 15, 1925
August 26, 1925
September 9, 1925
October 23, 1925
November 4, 1925

The New Republic

March 6, 1915
March 13, 1915
March 20, 1915
April 3, 1915
April 10, 1915
April 17, 1915
June 5, 1915
July 10, 1915
August 15, 1915
September 12, 1915
September 25, 1915
March 18, 1916
April 29, 1916
May 27, 1916
June 10, 1916
June 24, 1916
November 4, 1916
November 25, 1916
January 27, 1917
February 3, 1917
February 10, 1917
March 3, 1917
March 24, 1917
April 7, 1917
March 2, 1918
September 14, 1918
October 12, 1918
November 9, 1918
February 5, 1919
February 19, 1919
June 11, 1919
September 10, 1919
March 17, 1920
May 26, 1920
August 4, 1920
October 26, 1920
November 23, 1921
December 20, 1921
October 11, 1922
March 19, 1923
April 15, 1923
June 18, 1923
September 17, 1923
March 19, 1924
December 10, 1924
April 15, 1925
July 1, 1925
July 31, 1925

Appendix B: A Brief Overview of Events Important
in the Birth Control Movement's History, 1915-1925

- 1915 Anthony Comstock, most powerful and vocal opponent of the movement dies. Emma Goldman conducts coast to coast speaking tour in support of birth control. William Sanger tried and convicted for distributing pamphlet, Family Limitation. Sanger's conviction rallies press support for birth control as a free speech issue. Mary Ware Dennett founds first national birth control organization in the U.S., the National Birth Control League.
- 1916 America's first birth control clinic opened in New York by Margaret Sanger. Margaret Sanger and her sister Ethel Byrne arrested for running clinic. Byrne comes to trial first and is sentenced to Blackwell Island. While in prison, she goes on hunger strike and is force fed. Her actions receive front page media attention and rally support for the cause. Margaret Sanger begins to publish Birth Control Review, a magazine specifically devoted to the cause.
- 1921 Margaret Sanger organizes the American Birth Control League, the parent organization of the contemporary Planned Parenthood. Margaret Sanger organizes first American Birth Control Conference. Conference is held November 11-13 in New York. On last day of conference, Sanger is arrested. Media support rallied in favor of her right to free speech. Sanger was later released for lack of evidence against her.
- 1923 The Birth Control Research Bureau opens in New York. Sponsored by the American Birth Control League, the Research Bureau was in reality a center offering contraceptive advice to needy women.
- 1924 The British Journal Practitioner publishes a report about the success of various birth control techniques. The report is based on the results of over 1,000 cases at the American Birth Control Research Bureau.

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FOOTNOTES

¹For example see Lary May, Screening Out The Past: The Birth of Mass Culture and the Motion Picture Industry, New York: Oxford University Press, 1980.

²See 18 USC 1461, 18USC1462, 19 USC 1305. The statutes classified birth control information and devices with all that was obscene, lewd, and/or lascivious. The statutes also forbade the mailing, interstate transportation, and importation of contraceptive devices and information. See also, J.C. Ruppenthal, "Criminal Statutes on Birth Control," Journal of the American Institute of Criminal Law and Criminology, May 1919, pp. 48-51.

³For example see Peter Fryer, The Birth Controllers, London: Secker and Warburg, 1965 and David Kennedy, Birth Control in America, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970.

⁴In order to offer a perspective on the coverage given to the movement, a brief summary of significant events in the movement's history during 1915-1925 is presented in Appendix 3.

⁵Frank L. Mott, A History of American Magazines, 1895-1905, Vol. IV, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957, p. 360.

⁶Theodore Peterson, Magazines in the Twentieth Century Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 1956, p. 204.

⁷Articles judged negative toward the movement were articles which explicitly denounced the movement, which presented parenthood as the ultimate goal of humankind, or which indicated that anyone who practiced birth control was immoral, unnatural, or otherwise imbalanced. Articles judged positive were articles which explicitly praised the movement, indicated people could be fulfilled without parenthood, or presented the practice of birth control as a natural part of contemporary society.

⁸G. B. Hamilton, "Cheated," Good Housekeeping, August 1915, p. 150.

⁹Ibid.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 10.

¹¹Nancy Musselman, "The Homesick Woman," Good Housekeeping, November 1915, p. 568.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Maude Radford Warren, "Their Children," Good Housekeeping, December 1916, p. 134.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 136.

¹⁶"Editorial Statement," Good Housekeeping, December 1916, p. 13

¹⁷Olivia Dunbar, "Make Way for the Baby," Good Housekeeping, October 1918, p. 84.

¹⁸A.S. Monroe, "The Woman Who Should Marry," Good Housekeeping, August 1921, p. 30.

¹⁹W.L. George, "Women In The New World," Good Housekeeping January 1923, p. 14. See also, W.L. George, "Is There A Change In Morals," Good Housekeeping, February 1923, p. 78.

²⁰See Dorothy Dix, "Mirandy on Eugenics," Good Housekeeping, September 1916, p. 53.

²¹Herbert Croly, "Editorial Statement," The New Republic, November 1914, p. 3.

²²"The Control of Births," The New Republic, 6 March 1915, p. 114

²³"Against the 'Control of Births,'" The New Republic, 20 March 1915, p. 124.

²⁴George Henry Dole, "Condemning 'The Control of Births,'" The New Republic, 13 March 1915, p. 57.

²⁵Ibid.

²⁶A.O. Malley, M.D., "Borrowed Editorial," The New Republic, 10 July 1915, p. 245.

²⁷Della S. Lithgon, "Supporting 'The Control of Births,'" The New Republic, 13 March 1915, p. 157.

²⁸William E. Leonard, "On The Control of Births," The New Republic, 3 April 1915, p. 237.

²⁹"The Control of Births: Discussion," The New Republic, 17 April 1915, p. 273.

³⁰See "Anthony Comstock and Mrs. Sanger," The New Republic, 18 September 1915, p. 146 and "The Age of Birth Control," The New Republic, 25 September 1915, p. 197.

³¹"Editorial Notes," The New Republic, 3 February 1917, p. 3.

³²"Editorial Notes," The New Republic, 21 November 1921, p. 360.

³³"An Endorsement of Birth Control," The New Republic, 3 March 1917, p. 143.

³⁴"The Sin of Birth Control," The New Republic, 21 December 1921, p. 116.

³⁵"Editorial Notes," The New Republic, 1 July 1925, p. 137.

³⁶James P. Wood, Magazines in the United States, 2nd Ed., New York: Ronald Press, 1956, p. 135.

³⁷As noted, during these years the magazine underwent major editorial personnel changes and gave extensive coverage to World War I. Both of these factors may have influenced the lack of birth control coverage.

³⁸Annie Porritt, "The London Birth Control Conference," The Nation, 30 August 1922, p. 206.

³⁹H.L. Mencken, "The Sex Uproar," The Nation, 3 May 1922, p. 548.

⁴⁰"Birth Control in Mexico," The Nation, 3 May 1922, p. 548.

⁴¹For example see "Editorial Paragraph," The Nation, 14 November 1921, p. 585.

⁴²"Editorial Paragraph," The Nation, 6 February 1924, p. 128.

⁴³"Editorial Paragraph," The Nation, 5 March 1924, p. 245.

⁴⁴"Editorial Paragraph," The Nation, 5 March 1924, p. 245.

⁴⁵See Ayer, N.W. Ayer and Son's American Newspaper Annual and Directory.

⁴⁶W.J. Kerby, "Conditions, Tendencies in Relief Work," The Catholic World, April 1915, p. 72.

⁴⁷"The Foes of Our Own Household," The Catholic World, January 1918, p. 543.

⁴⁸"With Our Readers," The Catholic World, July 1918, p. 572.

⁴⁹"With Our Readers," The Catholic World, April 1922, p. 142.

⁵⁰Mott, A History of American Magazines, p. 526.

⁵¹"Question," JAMA, 8 January 1921, p. 196.

⁵²Until October of 1923, Index Medicus reflected this same attitude. Prior to that date articles indexed concerning birth control appeared only under the subject heading "Sociology." In October 1923, birth control articles also began appearing under the medical research heading "Conception (Prevention)." The AMA did not go on public record as endorsing birth control until 1937.

⁵³"Have Spermatozoa Functions or Effects Other Than Fertilization?," JAMA, 21 July 1921, pp. 42-43.

⁵⁴However, such research was reported in the British journal Practitioner. For example, see Dorothy Bocker, "Contraceptive Technique: A Consideration of 1,400 Cases," Practitioner, November 1924, pp. 74-90.

⁵⁵Chicago Gynecological Society, "Letter to the Editor," JAMA, 24 February 1923, p. 573.

⁵⁶Ellery Sedgwick as quoted by Frederick Lewis Allen in "Sedgwick and the 'Atlantic,'" Outlook and Independent, 26 December 1920, p. 1407.

⁵⁷"Some Misconceptions of Eugenics," Atlantic Monthly, January 1915, pp. 222-227.

⁵⁸Henry Bordeaux, "The Family and the Individual," Atlantic Monthly, February 1915, p. 184.

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